

A. C. Palmer



HOMŒOPATHY—ITS STATUS IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING.

Reprinted from the March number of *THE PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON*, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

As a matter of medical intelligence, and for the purpose of answering many inquiries respecting the condition of the College of Homœopathy in our State, and not for the purpose of awakening controversy, of which, in this matter, the profession has had quite sufficient, we call attention to the subject stated in the heading of this article.

Differences of opinion have long existed in our profession as to the most effectual means of ridding the community of what we regard as the delusions of this exclusive system of medical doctrine and practice, and different courses of conduct in relation to it have been pursued. Some have denounced and ridiculed without meeting it by exposure and argument; some have ignored it completely, while others would bring it to the light where its pretensions could be known, and would meet with argument and comparison its doctrines and practice. With us, in this country, the two first named methods have generally prevailed, with results with which we are all familiar.

In a few instances it has been forced by legislative enactments into proximity and comparison with *regular*, or what we regard as Scientific Medicine, and in the two principal instances that have occurred, sufficient results have followed to afford a basis of judgment as to the proper policy to be pursued.

In the *Michigan Medical News* of January 25th, is a letter from W. R. Birdsall, M. D., one of the associate editors of *THE PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON*, addressed to Professor E. S. Dunster, giving an account of the general decline of the system, especially on the Continent of Europe, and more particularly of the effect of the introduction of homœopathic professors and their teachings into the University of Pesth, in Hungary. This is the only place in Europe, so far as we can learn, where it has a prominent position in a government institution established by law, holding any relation to the teaching of regular medicine.

We have another letter before us, giving an account of the same affair, as related to the writer by Dr. Seligmann, Professor of the History of Medicine in the University of Vienna. Professor Seligmann inquired officially and fully into the matter for the purpose of presenting the facts to the Austrian Parliament, when

the question of introducing homœopathy into the great medical school of Vienna was proposed. He simply presented the facts to the Parliament without argument, as he and his colleagues in the university were indifferent as to the introduction of the professors and the teachings of the system into the school, feeling assured of their own high position, and not dreaming that the professional character or standing of their great Institution, or of its regular professors, would, in any way, be compromised by it, or that scientific medicine would in the least suffer from the comparison which would be instituted.

The account given by Professor Seligmann, as related in the letter, states: "A few years ago a bill was passed by the Hungarian Parliament establishing two professorships, and a hospital for the teaching of homœopathy at the University of Pesth. It was carried into effect, and has been in operation ever since. The homœopathic courses were made elective; supplementary to the regular course, and no examination was required. Professor Seligmann found, on good authority, that the greatest number of students at any one lecture during the whole time, was six, and that often the only hearers of one professor were the other professor and the assistants of both. He said that the history of homœopathy showed that it flourished while it was opposed and persecuted, but that since its introduction at the University of Pesth it had gradually lost ground in Hungary. It had proved, however, to be rather an expensive experiment to the government."

The Parliament of Austria did not, as was proposed, introduce it into the Vienna University. "The most decided opposition," Professor Seligmann said, "was from the Society of Homœopathic Physicians of Vienna, who presented a petition objecting to the passage of the bill, saying that homœopathy could stand upon its own ground, and did not need government aid; from which it was inferred that they did not wish to have the ridiculous result which had occurred at Pesth repeated at Vienna."

The State action in recognition and aid of homœopathy in Michigan was different in its details from that in Hungary. There, two professors of the system were introduced into the schools as colleagues of the professors of regular medicine. In Michigan, a separate college has been established, with no professional relations or communications existing between the two faculties. We find in the general calendar of the University of Michigan the following statement: "It is proper to remark that the two medical schools in this university are distinct organizations, and that, under the regulations established by the regents, the professors in one school are not called to take any part in

conducting the final examinations of students in the other, or in recommending them for graduation, or in signing their diplomas." It is true, that under the action of the regents, the students of the homœopathic college are permitted to attend a part of the lectures, those on anatomy, chemistry, physiology, and obstetrics, in the regular school, just as students in homœopathic colleges are allowed by the hospital regulations to take hospital tickets, and attend the clinical teaching of regular professors in Bellevue, Chicago, and other hospitals; but they are not here entered upon the faculty books, or specially recognized as members of the class; and no certificates or evidences of attendance are given them by the regular professors. The results in Michigan have not been of the exact character of those in Hungary, but, as shown in what follows, they are far from being satisfactory to, at least, a portion of the homœopaths.

In a "Memorial of the Homœopathic Physicians to the Honorable Legislature of Michigan" now before us, printed and being circulated for signatures, [since presented to the Legislature], asking for the removal of the Homœopathic College from its connection with the University, the following statements among others are made:

"Notwithstanding the large sums of money the people of this State have so generously expended on that school, and the best talent from the east and west which could be procured has been called to its professorships, yet it has not fulfilled the expectations of its friends, and we are reluctantly compelled to believe that it cannot in a generation to come, if ever.

"Some of our reasons for this belief are as follows:

* * * * *

"In Ann Arbor the allopathic department is old and well established. It monopolizes all the influence and best sentiment of the place. It is always hostile to the homœopathic college.

* * * Although "an ample hospital is now under the complete control of the faculty" (see the last announcement of the homœopathic department,) yet they have had less than half a dozen patients, and the prospects for the future are most unpromising.

* * * * *

"The location of the college four years ago in Ann Arbor was contrary to the desire of nine-tenths of the homœopathic physicians of the State, and was then considered a doubtful experiment, except by a few who were hopeful by this means to break up the old department.

"The experiment is a failure and can only be continued at a great and unnecessary cost to the people of this State.

* * * * *

"We respectfully petition your honorable body to so amend the Act of 1875, that the homœopathic college can be located elsewhere than Ann Arbor, and continue the appropriation as heretofore made."

The petition asks to have the college placed under a board of trustees distinct from the regents of the university.

It will be noticed that the statement is here made, that the object in establishing the college at the university was to break up the old or regular department. In this work, they of course, counted upon the aid of a portion of the regular profession, and upon the disgust or cowardice of the professors of the regular school inducing them to resign. The aid of numbers of the regular profession, (some acting from honorable, but we think mistaken professional motives, and some, it is thought, from lower feelings of rivalry and envy) they have had; but in this, as in other respects, the scheme, with all its abetting, has proven a failure.

During the past year the regular department has materially increased in numbers, while the homœopathic has diminished—the former having, according to the catalogue just published, three hundred and twenty-nine students, and the latter sixty-three: and several since entering the homœopathic college have transferred themselves to the college of medicine and surgery. Altogether the present out-look seems to justify the gloomy prognostication of the authors of the memorial.

It has long been the opinion of many of the wisest men of our fraternity that a great mistake has been made in the treatment of homœopathy. It has been much less violently assailed, and its adherents less denounced and shunned on the Continent of Europe than in Great Britain, and especially than in this country; and the result has been that while it is so nearly extinct on the Continent where it had its origin, as to justify the saying of Dr. Holmes, that like the erysipelas it fades out and disappears where it first commences, it has spread over this whole country, feeding upon what it claims as persecution and bigotry, and is far more prevalent here than anywhere else. It thrives when covered over and kept in darkness by simple denunciation or ridicule, but withers when brought to the light and exposed to the rays of fair discussion. This is true of all delusions and deceptions, and however, much aversion was excited by the introduction of this system into the University of Michigan, the effect has been and will be, here as in Hungary, to cause it to lose ground in proportion to its exposure. The lesson for the future from all this is too obvious to require, on this occasion, further statements.

A. B. P. *almer*